

PIXIE HOLLOW TALES



Art Lessons By Bess



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All About Fairies



IF YOU HEAD toward the second star on your right and fly straight on till morning, you'll come to Never Land, a magical island where mermaids play and children never grow up.

When you arrive, you might hear something like the tinkling of little bells. Follow that sound and you'll find Pixie Hollow, the secret heart of Never Land.

A great old maple tree grows in Pixie Hollow, and in it live hundreds of fairies and sparrow men. Some of them can do water magic, others can fly like the wind, and still others can speak to animals. You see, Pixie Hollow is the Never fairies' kingdom, and each fairy who lives there has a special, extraordinary talent.

Not far from the Home Tree, nestled in the branches of a hawthorn, is Mother Dove, the most magical creature of all. She sits on her egg, watching over the fairies, who in turn watch over her. For as long as Mother Dove's egg stays well and whole, no one in Never Land will ever grow old.

Once, Mother Dove's egg *was* broken. But we are not telling the story of the egg here. Now it is time for Bess' tale....



“JUST A SMIDGE more yellow—that’s it!”

Bess fluttered back from her latest painting to get a better look. Her studio was, as usual, a mess. Open tubes of paint lay on her table, and the cloths she used to wipe her hands were stained with dozens of yellow fingerprints. But Bess didn’t see any of that. While she was hard at work on a painting, she had eyes for nothing else.

This particular painting was very special to Bess, who was Pixie Hollow’s busiest art-talent fairy. Although she often painted portraits or still lifes, she liked to experiment. Other fairies didn’t always understand her more abstract paintings. But Bess loved the freedom of expressing herself this way.

Slowly Bess turned upside down in midair. Her brown hair dangled upon her palette. A few strands fell into the paint, but Bess didn’t notice.

She was deep in thought when she was startled by a voice.

“Bess!” Lily, a garden-talent fairy, appeared at the door of Bess’ tangerinecrate studio. “Did you hear?”



Bess, embarrassed to have been caught behaving oddly, quickly fluttered right-side-up again. Too late, she glimpsed at the yellow paint in her hair and quickly brushed it away from her face.

Lily didn't seem to have noticed.

"Big news," she said. "A laugh is coming. You know what that means!"

"An arrival!" Bess clapped her hands. "How exciting!"

Every time a baby laughed for the first time, the laugh floated straight to Never Land. There, the laugh turned into a brand-new fairy or a sparrow man. Each arrival was cause for celebration. New arrivals meant new friends. They also meant a friendly kind of contest between all the different talent groups of fairies. Each talent group always wanted another member. The light-talent fairies needed help catching sunbeams, and the mining talent fairies needed help digging. The cooking-talent fairies always hoped for someone else to bake muffins, and the water-talent fairies were eager to teach their best charms.

Naturally, Bess hoped the new fairy would be an art-talent fairy. She hurriedly wiped her hands and went to join Lily. She left her mess behind her. But who could worry about that? An arrival was coming!



At the lagoon, a crowd had gathered. Fairies and sparrow men laughed and hugged one another. It felt almost like a party.

Lily and Bess landed in the middle of the group. Leo, an art-talent sparrow man whose specialty was painting murals, waved to them. “Do you think we’ll get a new art-talent fairy this time?” he asked Bess. “We haven’t had anyone in ages. It’s our turn!”

“I wouldn’t mind having somebody else to enjoy the gardens with,” Lily said.

“The island’s magic knows best,” Bess said firmly.

“Look!” cried light-talent fairy Fira, blazing brightly as she darted above the others. “Here it comes!”

A tiny shimmer of light flickered overhead. Bess felt the air shiver with anticipation. The laugh fluttered downward, shifting from blue to pink to purple. It burst open to reveal a flash of sparkles—and a brand-new fairy!

She blinked several times, as if in surprise. The new fairy was very tiny, and she had thick, messy, curly hair in the brightest shade of red Bess had ever seen.



At this point, most new arrivals stepped forward and introduced themselves. But the new fairy did not. Instead she stood where she had landed, twirling a lock of red hair around her fingers.

Everyone looked at each other in confusion. Fira, who had taken care of new fairies before, asked kindly, “Can you tell us who you are?”

‘I—I think I can.’ The new fairy scratched the side of her head. Then the answer came to her. “My name is Scarlett!”

Fira smiled in encouragement. “Welcome to Pixie Hollow, Scarlett.”

“It’s good to be home!” Scarlett paused. “This *is* my new home, isn’t it?”

“Of course it is,” said Fira as she took Scarlett’s hand.

Bess, along with all the others, murmured their encouragement. Apparently the trip to Never Land had confused Scarlett a bit! But that was all right. Lots of fairies weren’t sure how to behave at first.

Fira said, “Tell us, Scarlett—what is your talent?”

All the fairies and sparrow men leaned closer, eager to hear the answer.

“I’m an art-talent fairy,” Scarlett said.

All the art-talent fairies cheered, and Bess hurried forward with the others to greet her. “How wonderful!” said Quill, an art-talent fairy who worked as a sculptor. “We’re so glad you’re one of us.”

“Pixie Hollow is a wonderful place to create art,” Leo explained. “I work on murals of the landscape. Bess here paints all kinds of beautiful pictures. Quill carves amazing statues. Whatever you want to do here, you’ll find all the help you need.”

Bess asked, “So what is it that you do, Scarlett? Are you a painter, like me? What kind of art will you create?”

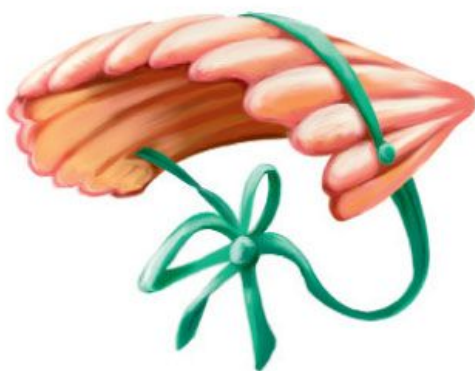
Scarlett thought for a moment before she shrugged. “I have no idea.”

Bess and Quill looked at each other, confused. How could Scarlett not know what kind of art-talent she had? Most fairies knew precisely what their specialties were from the moment they first arrived.

“What’s the matter?” Scarlett asked innocently. She began picking up twigs from the ground and twirling them into her hair. The twigs stuck out in every direction. “Is something wrong?”

“Of course not,” Bess said, but she didn’t quite mean it. Scarlett didn’t know her specialty, and she seemed to behave oddly.

There was no other way to say it: The new fairy was *weird*.



“HOW CAN SCARLETT not know what sort of art she’s interested in?” Quill whispered. She and Bess were huddled with the other art-talent fairies at the edge of the lagoon. Scarlett, still wearing her arrival garment, kept picking up seashells and trying them on as hats.

Bess’ glow blushed pink with embarrassment for Scarlett. Of course, Scarlett didn’t seem ashamed of her odd behavior.

Scarlett seemed even stranger because she didn’t know her own artistic specialty. Most fairies knew as soon as they arrived. Bess had emerged already eager to hold a paintbrush for the first time. She remembered when Jax, a glass-blowing-talent sparrow man, first arrived in Pixie Hollow. He had asked to be taken to the glassworks even before he had told anyone his name!

At last Scarlett noticed that everyone was watching her. “Am I doing something wrong?” she asked cheerfully. A pink shell slipped from her head into the sand.

“Of course not,” Leo said. He put a reassuring hand on her shoulder. “It’s simply that—that—” Bess knew he wanted to ask about Scarlett’s

funny behavior, but instead he stuck to what was simpler. “You see, most of us arrive knowing what kind of art we like.”

“Not everybody!” said Jolie, a papiermache-talent fairy. “I didn’t figure it out for almost five whole minutes. So you just wait. The answer will come to you.”

“I bet you figure out your specialty once you get your magic,” Bess said. “Terence, come and help us!”

“On my way!” cried Terence, a dust-talent sparrow man. It was Terence’s job to scatter pixie dust, which gave fairies their magic and allowed them to fly.

Terence flew over Scarlett and scattered a teacup of shimmering pixie dust over her. Scarlett held out her hands and twirled in the sparkling powder.

“There you go,” Bess said as Scarlett flapped her wings for the first time. “Now you can fly!”

“Oh, this is wonderful!” Scarlett cried as she rose into the air. She rose up, up, up—

CRASH!

She smacked her head into a tree branch.

“Ow!” yelled all the fairies. Scarlett hovered unevenly. Terence quickly went to her side and steadied her as they lowered to the ground.

“Are you all right?” Terence asked.

He looked at Scarlett and frowned. “I think you got some twigs in your hair when you hit the tree.”

“Oh, no, I put them there! I thought they would keep my curls out of my face,” Scarlett said. She re-twisted the knot of hair at the back of her head. “It’s comfortable, too. How does it look?”

“It’s—um—” Bess struggled to find the right words. “Well, it’s very original!”

Quill whispered, “We’ve got to get her to the coiffure-talent fairies!”

Scarlett finished doing up her hair with a smile. “What do we do next?”

The other fairies and sparrow men all glanced at each other. Usually, new art-talent fairies wanted to start creating art right away.

But Scarlett still didn't know what kind of art she would create. She was the only art-talent fairy who had ever gone so long without knowing. That meant nobody really knew what to do with her.



"I know," Bess said. "Let's take a look at your new room in the Home Tree. The decoration-talent fairies should have it ready by now."

"A room all for me?" Scarlett brightened. "I'd love to see it!"

Cheered, everyone zipped into the air and flew with Scarlett over Pixie Hollow. As they went, the fairies pointed out different places she needed to recognize: the lagoon, the mines, Lily's garden.

The art-talent fairies all lived in the same area of the Home Tree, and there was a branch they usually landed upon. Everyone descended gracefully—except Scarlett. She wobbled a little, unsure of her balance.

"Don't worry!" she called, pinwheeling her arms around. "I've got it!" Somehow Scarlett managed not to fall.

When they arrived, they discovered the decorating-talent fairies had outdone themselves. The walls were robin's-egg blue, and her silver, oval-shaped bed was piled high with soft pillows.

"It's so beautiful." Scarlett said as she stroked the milky white drapes. "This is really all for me?"

Bess nodded. She, along with Jolie and Quill, were touring the room too. "Usually the decorating-talent fairies put something on the walls, but not for us. They know that we'll create our own art soon enough. And we always like our own work best."

"Even if nobody else does!" joked Quill. They all laughed.

"And these clothes?" Scarlett threw open the closet door. "They're all for me?"

"The sewing-talent fairies are truly wonderful," Jolie said. Happily, she smoothed the skirt of her lilac-colored dress. "Which reminds me—are those new leggings, Quill? They're very nice!"

"Thank you," Quill said with a smile.

Nobody said anything about Bess' clothes, which were smudged with paint. Bess edged behind the footboard of Scarlett's bed, hoping the others wouldn't notice.

They didn't—because they were looking at Scarlett.



Scarlett had discarded her arrival garment and slipped on a bright turquoise skirt—but she was wearing it as a shirt. The hem didn't quite reach her knees. Now she had a long green stocking on one leg and was putting a blue-and-white striped stocking on the other.

“You know, Scarlett, those socks don't quite match, Bess pointed out.”

“Who wants to wear only one color when you can wear them all at once?” Scarlett grinned, proud of her strange outfit.

None of the others knew quite what to say. Quickly, Jolie clasped her hands together. “So, Scarlett, have you realized your special talent yet?”

Scarlett shook her head. “You'll help me think of it, right?”

Bess put one hand on Scarlett's shoulder. “We'll figure it out together,” she said. “You'll see!”



EVERY EVENING, THE residents of Pixie Hollow gathered together for dinner. The cooking-talent fairies prided themselves on creating delicious meals even for ordinary days. However, when they had heard about the new arrival, they'd made the night's meal even more special. The long tables for each talent group were decorated with wreaths of soft clover. Acorn soup simmered in pots, and huckleberry tarts waited beside every plate. As Bess and Scarlett flew into the dining room, Bess' mouth began to water.

"This feeling in my tummy—" Scarlett put her hands on her belly. One of the twigs behind her ear stuck out at an odd angle. "Does this mean—am I —*hungry*?"

Bess swiftly explained, "Yes, you're hungry. It's dinner time. This is where we all eat together, see?" She realized people must be staring at Scarlett's odd outfit.

"This room is amazing." Scarlett pointed upward. "See how the ceiling curves? That catches the light and makes everything seem taller."

Bess raised an eyebrow, surprised and impressed. Only an art-talent fairy would notice that kind of detail about the dining room.

Bess wanted to sit down to her meal like everyone else. Her belly was rumbling with hunger already. But Scarlett didn't budge. She kept turning around in a circle, admiring the dining hall.

"Scarlett? Don't you want to eat?" Bess asked.

"Oh, that's right—I'm hungry!" Scarlett smiled brightly at Bess, who couldn't help smiling back.

They headed toward the art-talent group table. Already the serving-talent fairies had begun flying to each place, pouring elderberry juice from pitchers. In fact, Scoop, one of the serving-talent sparrow men, was headed their way. Scarlett, who wasn't looking where she was going, fluttered into Scoop's path.

"Watch out!" Bess cried. But she was too late to keep them from colliding.

Both Scarlett and Scoop tumbled to the floor. Elderberry juice splashed everywhere. Scoop scowled as he rubbed his sore head, and Scarlett lay sprawled on the floor. Juice dripped from her hair and wings. "I'd fly backward if I could!" she said to Scoop. That was what fairies said instead of, "I'm sorry."

"That's all right," Scoop replied, though he looked a little grumpy. "We have plenty more juice in the kitchens."

Bess picked up the pitcher. "See, this didn't break. It's fine."

A few fairies giggled, but more helped dry Scoop and Scarlett. Soon everyone began eating and chatting again. "That's a relief," Bess said. "Nobody's staring anymore!"

"Were they staring?" Scarlett didn't even seem to mind the juice stain on her outfit. "I didn't notice."

"Don't worry about it," Bess said.

But, she couldn't help thinking that maybe it was time to worry about Scarlett a little bit.

Scarlett was klutzy. She wore weird clothes and had an even weirder hairstyle. The others were sure to laugh at her. Wouldn't they laugh even harder when they realized Scarlett still didn't know her specialty?

The only fairy who had ever taken so long to realize her unique skill was Prilla, who could appear to Clumsy children so that they believed in

fairies. Prilla's talent was one-of-a-kind, which was why nobody had known. Art talent isn't like that. Scarlett really should know her specialty by now.

Once they finally began eating with the others, Bess relaxed. Peculiar as Scarlett was, she was definitely friendly—and smart, too.



For instance, as Scarlett listened avidly, Leo described his latest work in progress, a mural of the seashore. Then she said, “How fascinating. You must have trouble with the water, though—it’s so much blue. Does it overwhelm the rest of the painting?”

“Sometimes,” Leo admitted. “I’ve varied the shades, from baby blue to indigo, and that helps. But I keep thinking it needs something more.”

Scarlett tilted her head to one side as she considered it. One of the twigs slipped loose from her hair and clattered to the floor, but Scarlett didn’t seem to notice. “Have you considered painting a windy day, instead of a calm one?”

Leo snapped his fingers. “Of course! If the sea is choppy, then the waves will be white with foam. That will make the whole mural more

interesting. Great idea, Scarlett!”

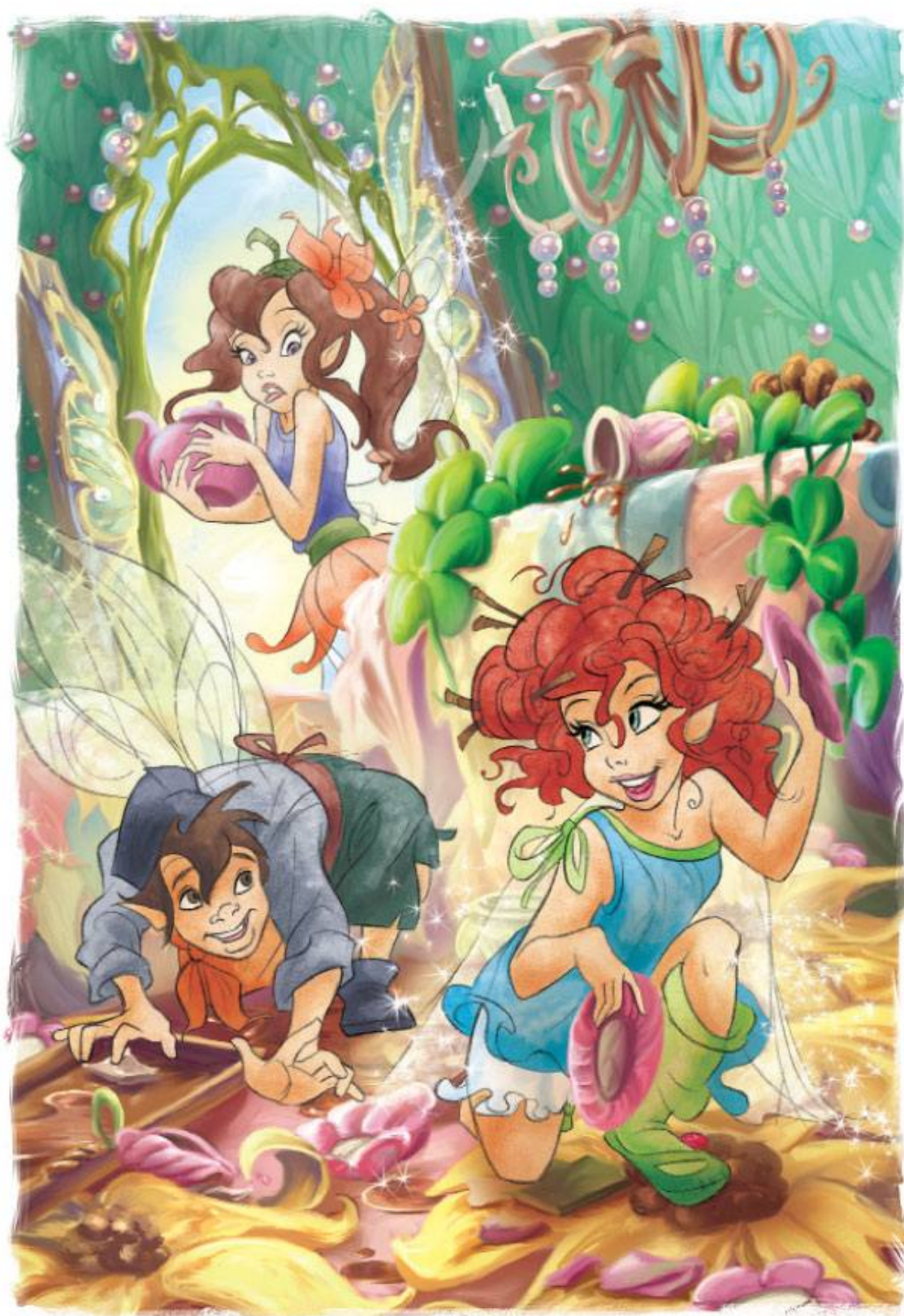
The other art-talent fairies grinned. Nobody even made a face when Scarlett picked up the fallen twig and twisted it back into her hair. She definitely had the instincts of an artist, that was certain.

As the serving-talent fairies took the empty plates away after dinner. Scarlett and Bess rose from the table. “You must be tired after your first day,” Bess said.

“I feel too excited to sleep.” Scarlett hugged herself. “It’s just so beautiful here! Why, look at these clover chains—that pale green is gorgeous!”

With that, Scarlett grabbed the clover chain and picked it up. She probably only meant to encourage Bess to take a closer look. But when she pulled the clover chain, it snaked across the table. The chain tangled around the glasses and plates, pulling them from their places—toward the edge of the table until they fell.

The glasses and dishes smashed to the floor, scattering into dozens of pieces.



“Oh, no!” Scarlett cried.

“It’s okay.” Scoop hurried over, ready to clean up. “People break glasses every so often.”

Bess’ glow blushed as brightly as Scarlett’s red hair.

Scarlett didn’t blush. She said to Scoop, “Are you sure you aren’t mad?”

Scoop sighed, then smiled. “No, I’m not. It’s sort of funny, now that I think about it.” He laughed, and Scarlett did too.

Some fairies had already left the dining hall, but many remained and had seen the whole thing. Bess could hear the whispers:

“The new one certainly is awkward!”

“Poor thing.”

“I wouldn’t want her near anything I was working on.”

Bess put her arm around Scarlett’s shoulders. “First thing tomorrow, you should come to my studio,” Bess said loudly. “We’ll see if you have a feel for painting.”

“That sounds great.” Scarlett looked perfectly happy. Bess smiled uncomfortably, trying to remember all the fragile things in her studio she’d need to hide away before tomorrow.



BESS GLANCED AROUND her tangerine-crate studio. As usual, it was quite untidy. Paints and brushes lay everywhere. Stray canvases were stacked in every corner.

As soon as she tucked her last glass jar behind some old blankets, she heard a rap on the side of the crate. “Bess? Are you there?”

“Hi, Scarlett. Welcome to my studio.”

Scarlett came inside. Scarlett’s eyes lit up as she saw Bess’ red and gold abstract painting. “Did you do that? It’s beautiful. So emotional!”

“That’s what I’m working on now.” Bess admitted, “Most people don’t like my abstract pictures.”

“It reminds me of a rose,” Scarlett said. “I think it’s marvelous.”

Bess smiled. The praise pleased her, and she now knew Scarlett had very good taste. Maybe she’ll turn out to be a painter after all! she thought.

Scarlett asked, “Will we be working on that painting today?”

“I thought we might try something different. Let’s stretch our canvases and get the paints,” Bess said. “We’ll have to be ready to begin before Fawn gets here.”

As they stretched white canvas over frames, Scarlett said, “How will Fawn be helping us?”

“Recently I’ve wanted to paint a portrait of a baby animal. So I asked Fawn to find a willing model. She’s an animal-talent. She should be here any moment.”

“Baby animals are adorable,” Scarlett said, watching as Bess smeared several paints upon a palette. Then she began doing the same herself. “Oh, I hope I’m a painter!”

As they finished preparing, Bess heard Fawn call, “Hello there!”

“Fawn! We’ve been waiting for you!” Bess hurried to the door of her studio. “Who have you brought for us to paint?—Oh!”

To Bess’ dismay, Fawn stood at the door with a baby skunk.

“Here’s your model!” Fawn announced cheerfully.

“Yes, but—a skunk? He won’t—” Bess pinched her nose with two fingers and waved her other hand in front of her!

“Oh, no, he’ll be fine.,” Fawn insisted. “Skunks only spray when they’re frightened. You won’t scare him, will you?”

“I think he’s lovely,” Scarlett said. “The contrast of black and white in his fur should look very striking in the painting.”



That's true, Bess thought. She smiled gently at the little skunk. The skunk scampered into the studio, ready to pose.

"Look at him," Fawn giggled. "He's flattered!"

The little skunk had fluffed his tail. He turned his head this way and that, trying to look more handsome.

"Perfect," Scarlett said. "Hold it just there! You look great."

The tiny skunk preened.

Bess got to work right away. She sat at her easel, and Scarlett sat at hers, a few feet away. Fawn hovered several steps behind them, watching them work and keeping the baby skunk company.

Soon Bess was too absorbed in her painting to notice what the others were doing.

A few shadows here—maybe a little white there—Bess stuck the tip of her tongue out of her mouth, the way she often did when concentrating. Then hurriedly she pulled it back in. She didn't want to appear silly in front of the others!

"Scarlett?" Bess said, still looking at her own canvas. "How are you doing?"

"Um." Scarlett paused, then repeated, "Um."

Bess turned from her painting to look at Scarlett's. Her heart sank.



Although Bess' painting was hardly more than a few lines on the canvas, the shape was clearly that of a skunk. Scarlett's painting didn't look like a skunk. It didn't look like much of anything. All Scarlett could paint was a scribble. And not even a black and white scribble!

Fawn flew a little closer and frowned. "Is that supposed to be a dragonfly? I can bring one here, if you want."

"That's all right, Fawn. We're fine," Bess said quickly. She was worried about the disappointed look on Scarlett's face. Thinking fast, she suggested, "Maybe you should try something abstract. Like the painting of mine you liked so much."

Scarlett brightened. "That's a good idea. I can just—swirl the paint around."

Bess felt more hopeful as she turned back to her own work. The little skunk was still posing perfectly. She said to Fawn, "Tell your friend that he's a wonderful model."

Fawn spoke to the skunk. What she said sounded like so much chirping and humming to Bess. The baby skunk brightened and arched his tail to look even prettier.

Scarlett smiled

The skunk's face smiled back from Bess's canvas. She still had much to do, but this was progress. Bess called, "How does yours look, Scarlett?"

"I'm not sure," Scarlett said weakly.

Bess turned to see Scarlett's canvas. She had smeared paint all over it, but it didn't look anything like Bess' abstract work. Instead, the painting looked like a big blur.

Scarlett said, "I think I'm not a painter."

"You can't be sure yet," Bess insisted. "Let your feelings go. Express yourself! Go wild! Get lost in emotion!"

"Okay." Scarlett squeezed a large blob of yellow paint onto her palette. She took a deep breath as she scooped it up in her fingers. "Emotion. Wild. Right—now!"

Scarlett threw the yellow paint toward the canvas. It splattered brightly.

"Well," Fawn said, "I guess that looks cheerful."

"Cheerful!" Scarlett bounced up and down, getting excited. "So now some—blue!"

Blue paint went splat onto the canvas. This, too, looked cheerful—but it clashed with the yellow, in Bess' opinion.

Scarlett frowned. She'd seen it too. "I need something to tie the colors together, don't I? What about—green?"

"It's worth a try," Bess said.

Quickly Scarlett grabbed a tube of green and squeezed a huge goop of it into her hand. She swirled her hand around and closed her eyes, muttering, "Be wild. Wild. Wild!"

Without opening her eyes, Scarlett threw the green paint as hard as she could.

Except that she missed the canvas.

Bess gasped as paint splattered all over the baby skunk. The skunk, startled, lifted his tail and—

“Oh, no!” all three fairies cried as skunk-stink filled the studio. Bess and Scarlett ran outside for fresh air, coughing. Fawn remained inside to calm the little skunk.

“Is he okay?” Scarlett cried to Fawn. “I didn’t mean to scare him!”

“He’ll be fine,” Fawn said. Through the window, Bess could see Fawn petting the skunk’s head. “He’s mostly embarrassed.”

Bess sighed. “Don’t feel bad, Scarlett. That could have happened to anyone.”

“At least we know one thing,” Scarlett said. “We know I’m not a painter.”



AFTER FAWN HAD taken the baby skunk back home, Bess and Scarlett hovered outside the studio, unsure what to do. The entire tangerine create stank of skunk.

“What will I tell everyone?” Bess said. The other fairies were sure to think this was ridiculous.

Scarlett said, “Tell them the truth, of course—that I frightened the skunk. I’d fly backwards if I could, Bess. I know this leaves you without a place to work.”

“That’s all right,” Bess said. She felt like she could use a couple of days to recover. “I just wish I knew when I could use my studio again.”

“Only a couple of days,” cried a voice from overhead, “if you let me help you!”

Bess and Scarlett looked up. Above them, Lily hovered in the air, holding a tomato so plump her arms could hardly fit around it. “Why do you have a tomato?” Bess said in surprise.

“The best way to remove skunk-stink is with tomato juice.” Lily nodded firmly. “Trust me. This is exactly what your studio needs.”

Scarlett smiled in delight. “Really? How does it work?”

Lily explained, “We’re going to squash tomatoes in Bess’ studio. We’ll make a big mess, but the juice will take the smell away. Then Rani has promised to rinse everything clean with some water charms.”

“It’s that simple?” Bess felt relieved. “Are you sure you both have time to help?”

“It’s the least I can do, after frightening the skunk,” Scarlett said.

Lily giggled. “I’m glad to help, but really, I just think squashing tomatoes is fun. Watch!”

With that, Lily flew to the door of Bess’ studio, dropped the tomato at the open doorway and jumped down upon it. Brilliant red juice sprayed in every direction—and all over Lily.

Everyone began to laugh. Lily looked so silly, with tomato juice dripping from her hair and her nose.

Oh, dear—will I look like that, too? Bess didn’t like looking ridiculous in front of her friends. Yet she realized that already the smell wasn’t so bad. It was going to work!

If it would make her studio usable again, Bess was willing to do anything, even look silly.

For the next couple of hours, Bess, Lily and Scarlett worked together. They would fly to Lily’s garden to gather tomatoes, then back to the tangerine-crate studio. Each fairy would put a tomato on the floor, fly up to the ceiling, and then—SPLAT! SPLAT! SPLAT!



They squashed each tomato, flying downward in belly-flops and swan dives.

The smell improved bit by bit.

Scarlett and Lily seemed to be having the time of their lives. Neither one paid any attention to the red juice and pulp all over their clothes and skin. Bess couldn't relax, knowing that she was the messiest she'd ever been in her life. But she kept working hard.

After they'd squashed the last tomato, Scarlett said, "Is that it?" She sounded disappointed that the fun ever had to stop.

"Afraid so," Lily said. "You'll want to let the studio air out for the rest of the day, Bess."

"That's okay," Bess said. "I'm just glad it will be all right."

"There must be so many interesting uses for the plants in your garden, Lily."

Scarlett looked thoughtful. "Tomatoes get rid of skunk-stink. Who would have guessed? What else can you tell me?"

Lily's eyes lit up. Bess knew that Lily didn't talk much—but when she began chatting about her garden, she could go on for a while.

Quickly Bess said, "I'm going to go clean up, if that's okay with you."

"That's fine," Lily said, taking Scarlett's hand. "The two of us have plenty to talk about."

Bess flew to a nearby stream to wash up. She didn't want everyone in Pixie Hollow to see her while she was stained tomato red from head to toe. It took her a long time and a lot of scrubbing before she felt presentable again.

By the time she returned to her studio, Lily and Scarlett had left.

Now, where might Scarlett have gone? Bess wondered. She could simply have gone back to her own room in the Home Tree. But that didn't seem much like Scarlett. She would rather be out exploring.

Bess decided to visit the other art-talent fairies. Chances were that Scarlett would be with one of them.

Once her wings were dry, she flew to Quill's sculpture studio, and realized she was right. Through the window she saw Quill and Scarlett sitting together.

"Hello!" Bess called. "Scarlett, I was looking for you! You wandered off!"

Scarlett held a hand to her forehead, as if in distress. "I'm surprised you want to see me after what I did. Ruining your studio!"

Bess could tell that Scarlett was joking, but Quill couldn't. Like many art-talent fairies who specialized in sculpture, Quill could be stubborn as a rock sometimes.

"I told Scarlett that wasn't her fault!" Quill said to Bess. Her eyes flashed as she looked at Bess.

Bess smiled, hoping to set Quill at ease. "Scarlett's just joking. Lily knew how to clean the scent out. In a couple of days, my studio will be as good as new."

Scarlett brightened. "Oh, good!"

Reassured, Quill settled back into the conversation. "Scarlett and I were just talking about my mermaid statue."

Sitting in the corner was the mermaid. Quill had carved it last year, and every fairy in Pixie Hollow agreed it was her greatest statue yet. The limestone mermaid seemed to be leaping from the water. Quill had etched every curl of her hair and every scale of her tail.

“Tell her what you said, Scarlett,” Quill whispered.

Scarlett pointed at the mermaid’s arched tail. “See how her fins curve? The statue really seems to move.”

Once again, Bess was impressed. Scarlett certainly had artistic instincts, even if she couldn’t paint!

Quill said, “She sounds like a sculptor to me.”

“Could be.” Bess nodded.

“I know just the thing!” Quill ran to her supply cupboard. From inside she pulled out a large block of marble the color of a soft pink rose. “This marble is very special,” she said. “The mining-talent fairies brought it to me just last week. There’s not a single flaw in the stone.”

“Look how the surface shines,” Scarlett said. “You would hardly have to polish the statue when you were done.”

Proudly, Quill held out her chisel and mallet. “Scarlett, I want you to carve the stone.”

Scarlett gasped. “Are you sure? Don’t you want this for yourself?”

“I want to see what you can do,” Quill said firmly. Bess nodded.

Slowly, Scarlett took the chisel and mallet. Bess took Quill’s hand in anticipation.

“I’m trying to see a shape in the stone,” Scarlett said.

“Good!” Quill said.

“A rose, maybe. Or a tulip.” Scarlett closed her eyes, as if she were looking for the shape in her mind, instead of the stone.

“You’ll see it once you start,” Bess said. “Go on, Scarlett, try it!”

Scarlett put the chisel at the very top of the pink marble and took a deep breath. “Here goes,” she whispered. Then she brought the mallet down hard.

A jagged line split the entire block of marble in two! Bess and Quill stared, horrified, as each half of the block tumbled off its pedestal onto the floor.

Quill made a face that would’ve been funny if Bess hadn’t been so embarrassed for Scarlett.

“Oh, no!” Scarlett cried. “I’ve ruined your marble!”

“You haven’t ruined it,” Quill said quickly. She kneeled to scoop the fallen half into her arms. “Now I can make two smaller statues instead of only one.”

Scarlett sighed. “Still, I did everything wrong again. I must not be a sculptor, either.”

Bess patted Scarlett’s shoulder. “It’s okay,” she said. “We’ll find an answer soon.”



Deep down, however, Bess was starting to wonder if they would ever figure out what Scarlett could do right.



“MAYBE YOU SHOULD take a break for a while,” Bess said as she and Scarlett left Quill’s studio. “You’ve had quite a day.”

Scarlett said, “Really, I’d rather keep trying. I want to learn what my talent might be.”

They both zoomed into the sky. From above, both Bess and Scarlett could see Pixie Hollow as the busy, magical place that it was. In a small brook, Rani the water-talent fairy swam in the current. She was the only fairy who could swim, as she had no wings to weigh her down. Overhead, Fira the light-talent fairy taught a group of fireflies a new flight formation.

A group of cooking-talent fairies flew nearby carrying fruits and vegetables from Lily’s garden. Bess could hear one of them asking another, “Where did all the tomatoes go?”

She turned to share the joke with Scarlett. But Scarlett’s face was sad.

“Scarlett?” Bess nudged Scarlett toward a nearby maple tree. They perched on the edge of a branch amid the wide green leaves. “Are you all right?”



“It’s just hard to see everyone so busy,” Scarlett said. “Each fairy and sparrow man in Pixie Hollow has a talent. They work all day doing what they love. I want that, too.”

This was the first time Bess had seen Scarlett being anything less than cheerful. No, it wouldn’t do any good to ask Scarlett to rest. They had to keep searching until they found the kind of art Scarlett could create.

She realized that they weren’t far from Aidan’s workshop. That gave Bess an idea. “Tell me, Scarlett—do you like jewelry?”

“I think so,” Scarlett said. She was twisting a brand-new twig in her hair.

“We’re going to visit the sparrow man who makes the most important jewelry of all,” Scarlett said. “Queen Clarion’s crown!”



“Jewelry-making talent?” said Aidan. “Well, it’s worth a try.”

Bess, Scarlett and Aidan all stood in the middle of Aidan’s workshop. The workshop was a cozy little place, comfortably cluttered with metal and tools. One of the queen’s golden bracelets lay on his workbench, waiting to be fixed. In the big fireplace, a roaring blaze warmed the whole room..

“Aidan is Pixie Hollow’s only crown-repair talent sparrow man,” Bess explained to Scarlett. “He fixes all kinds of jewelry, not only the queen’s crown. That means he works with gold and silver more than most fairies do. He isn’t an art-talent sparrow man himself, but he helps the jewelry-making talent fairies by sharing precious metals.”

Scarlett nodded. “I understand. He could teach me about working with the metal, even if we do different things with it. Right?”

“Exactly,” Aidan said. He pointed to a small bar of silver on his work bench. “The mining-talent fairies brought this yesterday. Would you like me to melt a bit for you? You could try making a chain, or a ring.”

The idea clearly appealed to Scarlett.

Still, she hesitated. “I wouldn’t—I couldn’t—break the silver, could I?”

Aidan laughed gently. “You can’t break silver. Even if it gets dented or scratched, I can always melt it all over again.”

Scarlett took a deep breath. “Okay. I’ll give it a try.”

Swiftly Aidan went to work. He pumped the bellows so that the flames in the fireplace leaped higher. Then he held the silver bar in a pair of tongs and dipped it into the fire. Within seconds, the metal began to melt. Aidan quickly held the bar over a clay plate, and the liquid silver drizzled onto it.

“There,” Aidan said. “Let it cool for a few seconds.”

As Bess and Scarlett watched, the liquid silver started to take form. Scarlett picked up one of Aidan’s tools and prodded a corner of the silver puddle. She managed to nudge the silver into something like a shape.

“That’s it!” Bess said. “That’s how you start.”

Encouraged, Scarlett started to mold the silver. Bess’ excitement instantly vanished. Scarlett wasn’t creating a ring, a bracelet or any other sort of jewelry. She only managed to nudge the metal into a roundish sort of saucer.

Without looking up, Scarlett said, “I’ve got it wrong, haven’t I?”

“I’m afraid so,” Bess answered quietly.

Everyone was silent for a second.

Then Aidan, trying hard to be cheerful, said, “Well, no harm done.”

Scarlett groaned. She walked away from the silver toward the fireplace. Bess followed her. Behind them, Aidan carefully collected the silver.

Scarlett asked, “Bess, are you sure that every art-talent fairy finds her specialty eventually?”

“Absolutely positive,” Bess said uncertainly.

“I hope you’re right,” Scarlett said. “At least this time wasn’t a total disaster—whoa!”

She had tripped over one of the pots waiting to be fixed, and fell down sideways onto one end of Aidan’s workbench. The other end tilted upwards sharply. Everything on the workbench flew up in the air—and Queen Clarion’s golden bracelet fell into the fire!

“Oh, no!” Aidan cried. “The queen’s bracelet—it’s melting!”

“I’ve got it!” Bess tried to grab the bracelet, but the flames were too hot.

“Don’t get burned!” Scarlett pushed past Bess with the tongs. She made a grab at the bracelet with them, but she had never used tongs before. As

soon as the bracelet was lifted, it slipped down into the ashes. Soot billowed out, blackening their faces.

“Let me,” Aidan said. He took the tongs and quickly fished the bracelet out. It was still in one piece, but some of the fine scrollwork had blurred when the gold had started to melt.

“Oh, no!” Bess cried, coughing. “Scarlett, are you all right? What about you, Aidan?”

“I’m okay,” Aidan said.

Scarlett rose from the floor and brushed herself off. “I didn’t mean to make such a mess, Aidan.”



“That’s okay,” he said. “I’ll have to redo the engraving, but that’s just a chance to try something new.”

“Looks like I’ll have to try something new too,” Scarlett said. Her sooty face was downcast.

Scarlett must be able to create some kind of art, Bess thought. But can we figure out what it is before she burns Pixie Hollow down?



FIRST THING NEXT morning, Bess started visiting other art-talent fairies to see who might try teaching Scarlett that day.

All the fairies agreed that Scarlett should still explore her creative ability. However, nobody would volunteer to work with her next.

“Glass breaks very easily,” Jax said in the glass-blowing studio. “If she trips into our shelves, she could ruin weeks of our work!”

“I’ve been working on this seaside mural for more than a month,” Leo said. He was painting the choppy waves Scarlett had suggested. “If she made a mistake, it might take me another month to fix it.”



“Oh, no,” Jolie said, throwing her hands in front of her papier-mache stars. “Scarlett can’t come in here. No, no, no.”

Bess sighed in discouragement. She couldn’t blame the others for wanting to protect their work. Already she knew she would have to start her baby-skunk portrait over from scratch.

If only there were some safe place for Scarlett to experiment.

Then Bess’ face lit up in a smile. She’d had an idea!

What if Scarlett had a studio of her very own? Then she could explore any kind of art she wanted, for as long as she wanted, and nobody else’s work would be at risk.

The more Bess thought about the plan, the more she liked it.

Of course, first she would need a lot of help.



“Everybody—push!”

Bess pushed as hard as she could, along with a half dozen other fairies. Slowly, the pumpkin shell lifted from the ground. They had it!

“This way!” Tinker Bell cried. “Follow me!”

Laughing, Bess and the others began flying the pumpkin shell across the meadow. Above them, Terence showered down a bit of pixie dust to lighten the load.

Bess glanced downward. Fluttering beneath them were several cooking-talent fairies, each carrying a pot of scooped-out pumpkin. Tonight everyone would share pumpkin muffins!

They had selected the perfect place for Scarlett’s new studio—a shady glen not far from Bess’ tangerine crate. The fairies settled the pumpkin shell beneath an elm tree.

“Perfect,” Tink said as she picked up her saw. “What this studio needs now is a door and some windows.”

As Tinker Bell cut a door and windows into the pumpkin shell, other fairies worked on projects to help. The weaving-talent fairies wove a soft hammock for Scarlett to rest in. Fira enchanted a lantern that would burn throughout the night, as brightly or as softly as Scarlett wished. All the art-talent fairies brought different supplies, so Scarlett could try each kind of art in turn.



When they were almost done, Lily said, “One more charm, and we’ll have the perfect studio. Ready?”

Everybody nodded. Lily flew over the pumpkin shell, scattering pixie dust—but where it landed, it turned into glitter and made the pumpkin shell hard.

“There!” she said. “Now the pumpkin shell will always stay fresh. Scarlett can use this studio forever.”

Bess said, “I can’t wait to show her. Come on, let’s find Scarlett!”

Everyone raced through Pixie Hollow, calling Scarlett’s name. Bess and Lily found her in Lily’s garden.

“I was trying flower arranging,” Scarlett said. The flowers she had picked didn’t match, however. The colors of the petals clashed as terribly as the clothes she wore. “Looks like that’s not my talent either.”

“Oh—my begonias—” Lily put one hand to her mouth. Then she said, “They’ll grow back.”

Scarlett looked even sadder.

Quickly, Bess said, “Wait until you see what we’ve made for you!”

They took her hands and flew with her to the pumpkin-shell studio. “Isn’t it wonderful?” Bess cried as she led Scarlett inside. “Look, you can try paints. Varnishes. Engraving. Anything you want!”

“I can try all by myself,” Scarlett said sadly. “Nobody wants to work with me anymore.”

Bess and Lily looked at each other, embarrassed. They hadn’t realized Scarlett would know why they had built her a studio.

Scarlett quickly added, “But it was so kind of you. Of all of you. And it’s the most beautiful studio ever!”

As Bess and Lily left, Bess tried to tell herself that Scarlett would be all right now. Surely she would find her specialty now.

But Bess couldn’t shake the feeling that Scarlett was even sadder than before.



THE NEXT MORNING, Bess stood outside her tangerine-crate studio, waiting hopefully. “Is it ready?” she asked.

“One more wash should do it,” Rani answered.

With a wave of Rani’s hand, a fountain sprang up inside the studio. Water splashed everywhere! The mist made little rainbows in each window.

Then Rani waved her hand again, and all the water was gone. “Finished!” Rani called. “Now your studio is as good as new.”

Bess walked inside, took a deep breath, and smiled. No skunk-stink remained. Her studio smelled fresh and sweet. And it had never been so clean!

I’ll mess it up soon enough, Bess thought happily. She was thinking of the brushes and paints she would leave lying around when she got back to work on her pictures.

“You’ve done a wonderful job, Rani,” she said. “It feels good to have everything back to normal.”

“I was happy to help,” Rani said.

“I’ll be going now. I bet you can’t wait to start a new painting after taking two whole days off!”

It was tempting to dive back into her work, but there was something else Bess wanted to do. “Actually, I’m going to check on Scarlett first.”

Bess waved goodbye to Rani and flew across the glen to Scarlett’s pumpkin-shell studio. The orange shell glittered in the midday sun.

“Hello?” Bess called. “Scarlett, are you there?”

“Here I am.” Scarlett opened the door of her studio.

“I wanted to see how you were this morning,” Bess said. “What have you tried out in your new studio so far?”

“Nothing,” Scarlett said.

“Nothing? But—you can try anything here! We brought tons of supplies and books.”

“I simply can’t stand making another mess right now.” Scarlett’s glow had dimmed to a flicker, and her wings drooped. Her confidence had been badly hurt during the past few days. “I want to do something I can do well, but I can’t imagine what that would be.”

Bess thought hard. Scarlett needs to do something right—so I shouldn’t push her toward another talent yet—but it should be something creative.

She snapped her fingers. “We could use more paint.”

Confused, Scarlett asked, “More paint?”

“All art-talent fairies have to learn to make paints and plasters. You know, art materials. That’s not a talent; that’s something we teach each other.” Bess smiled.

Scarlett brightened too. “That must be very important.”

“It is! None of us could ever create if the others didn’t help make our supplies.”

Already, Scarlett was flapping her wings in anticipation. “How do we do that?”

“I’ll show you.” Bess took Scarlett’s hand. “Come on!”

They flew quickly over Pixie Hollow, laughing in the sunshine. Bess knew precisely what to look for, but not where to find it. She dipped down, and up, then down again, searching through the forest.

“Leo needs some dark green paint,” Bess called to Scarlett. “That means we need to find some Boing-Boing Ivy.”

“Boing-Boing Ivy?” Scarlett asked. “Why do they call it that?”

“You’ll see.”

Scarlett pointed to a few ivy leaves dangling from a nearby branch. “That’s ivy, isn’t it?”

“Don’t touch it!” Bess swiftly darted between Scarlett and the dangling leaves. “Yes, it’s ivy—but it’s Scritch-Scratch Ivy. If you get it on your skin, you’ll be itchy for a week!”

“I’ll remember that,” Scarlett said. She pointed to a nearby vine. “What about that? Is that Boing-Boing Ivy?”

“That’s a Cuddle Vine,” Bess corrected her. “Boing-Boing Ivy usually grows a little closer to the ground. Let’s fly lower.”

Sure enough, as soon as they got within a few feet of the ground, Bess spotted what they sought. There, creeping up the trunk of a large birch, grew a thick patch of Boing-Boing.

“Oh, it’s beautiful!” Scarlett said as they landed on the shady forest floor. She took one of the broad, soft leaves in her hand. “This is what we use for dark green? Do we pick the leaves?”

“The green dye comes out better if we don’t,” Bess explained. “We should pull the ivy off the tree, so that the vine and leaves are both attached. The vine is the most important part.”



“I understand,” Scarlett said. “Let’s get started!”

When Scarlett grabbed vines in both hands, Bess quickly said, “Be careful!” But she was a little too late. Scarlett pulled hard, until—

BOING!

The vines snapped back to the tree trunk. Scarlett tumbled backward onto the ground.

“Wow,” Scarlett said. “They’re very—”

“Stretchy,” Bess said.

“And slippery!” Scarlett’s hands were shiny with the slick Boing-Boing Ivy sap.

“We need to pull even harder,” Bess explained. “But the vines are so elastic that they’re hard to tug free. And of course, they’re slippery, so it’s easy to lose your grip—”

“Which is when the vines go boing!” With determination, Scarlett grabbed a twig that had fallen from her hair and twirled it back into place. “I see how they got the name. Is there any trick to it?”

Bess sighed. “We just have to keep trying until the vine finally pulls free. We’ll both fall down a dozen times while we’re doing this. It happens to everybody.”

That was the part that Bess found most comforting. She didn’t mind looking a little silly while collected Boing-Boing Ivy because *everyone* looked silly doing it. Surely Scarlett would be reassured too.

But Scarlett didn’t need anyone to make her feel better. “Pulling Boing-Boing vines sounds like fun! Let’s get started!”

They both grabbed handfuls of ivy. “Just pull slowly,” Bess said, tugging the ivy carefully away from the tree.

“I’m trying,” Scarlett said, grimacing as she pulled.

Maybe we’d make more progress if I pushed while she pulled, Bess thought. Quickly she slipped beneath the vine so she was on the other side, pushing outward. “Here we go. Take it easy, and—Oh!”

The ivy slipped from their hands with a BOING! The vine smacked into Bess’ tummy and pulled her backward with it. Bess felt herself zooming toward the tree, until—



CRASH.

“Bess?” Scarlett ran to the tree trunk. “Bess, are you okay?”

Bess groaned. She was pinned against the birch tree. “I’m fine! Embarrassed, that’s all.”

Finally sure that Bess wasn’t hurt, Scarlett started to giggle. “You did look funny.”

“I bet.” Bess laughed as she started to wriggle free. But she couldn’t quite tug herself loose from the vines. She pulled and pulled, but she couldn’t budge.

Scarlett said, “Bess? Are you sure you’re okay?”

Bess gulped. “I’m afraid—I’m afraid I’m stuck!”



“YOU’RE STUCK?” Scarlett clapped her hands to her cheeks. “Oh, no!”

Bess tried one more time to free herself from the vines, but she couldn’t budge. The ivy held her firmly against the tree trunk.

“Oh, yes,” she said. “I’m stuck.”

“Does this happen all the time too?”

Scarlett asked.

“No,” Bess admitted. “I think I’m the first fairy who ever managed to tie herself up with the ivy.”

She thought about what it would be like when Scarlett went for help. The others would set her free, but oh, they would laugh! They wouldn’t mean to be unkind, but who could help laughing at something like this?

Scarlett’s eyes widened as she looked at Bess’ face. “Are you embarrassed? You shouldn’t be. You were only trying to show me what to do.”

Bess’s glow turned pink. “I know you’re right, but I feel—well, pretty silly.”

“Trust me,” Scarlett said. Her expression became determined. “It’s okay, Bess. I’ll take care of it. Nobody else will ever find out.”

Scarlett grabbed the vines and started pulling. She tugged so hard that her wings beat faster than a hummingbird's. There still wasn't enough room for Bess to wiggle free. Scarlett pulled, and pulled, and pulled, and—

BOING!

She lost her grip and went flying backwards. After a couple of loops in the air, Scarlett landed flat on her back in the mud.

"Are you hurt?" Bess asked anxiously.

"I'm fine. What about you? Did it hurt when the vine snapped back?"

Bess shook her head. "Not a bit. Can you still pull with your wings all muddy?"

"I can use my feet and hands just fine." Scarlett sprang up as though nothing had happened. "We'll try again. This time, you push against the vines at the same time I pull. Ready?"

"Ready," Bess said.

Scarlett took two fistfuls of vine. "One—two—three!"

Bess pushed as hard as she could. The vines were slippery against her hands. She grimaced, but she kept pushing, and Scarlett kept pulling, until—

BOING!

Scarlett went tumbling, head over heels. She somersaulted backwards until she landed, face-down, in the mud puddle again.

"Scarlett!" Bess cried.

But Scarlett clambered out of the mud once more. To Bess' astonishment, Scarlett was grinning.

Scarlett held out her arms and feebly beat her mud-heavy wings. "So, how do I look?" She turned that way and this, as though she were modeling the latest creation of the dressmaking fairies. Instead she was only modeling a lot of reddish-brown mud.

"You look—really silly!" Bess started to laugh, and Scarlett joined in. Together they giggled for what seemed like a very long time, peals of laughter ringing in the glade. How ridiculous they both were! But—somehow—they were still having fun.



When they finally stopped laughing, Scarlett wiped happy tears from her eyes. Mud smudged her cheeks. “Okay, let’s try again.”

“Again?” Bess said. “Don’t you think you had better go for help?”

“Only if I have to,” Scarlett said. “I really think I can get it myself, if I just give it one more twist.”

Bess knew, if she were in Scarlett’s place, she would have given up by now. She would have flown to find other fairies right away. And if Scarlett were in her place—stuck against a tree—she wouldn’t be embarrassed. Scarlett wasn’t a bit scared of looking silly. Maybe she wasn’t scared of anything.

Bess wished she could be that brave.

Then she realized: She had just wished to be like Scarlett. Scarlett! The one with no talent! The one who put crazy twigs in her hair and wore strange clothes! Who would want to be like Scarlett?

Bess would, she thought as she watched Scarlett grab the ivy vines once more.

“All right,” Scarlett said, bracing her feet against the ground. “This time I’m going to twist the vines at the same time. That might break them. Got it?”

“Absolutely,” Bess said. “Let’s go!”

Bess pushed with all her might. Scarlett pulled even harder. The ivy vines twisted in her grasp, until—

SNAP!

Bess and Scarlett both fell down into the mud puddle as the vines gave away. Together they laughed even harder than they had before.

“Look at all these vines!” Scarlett held up a handful of Boing-Boing Ivy. “How much do we need for paint?”

“We’ve got more than enough now,” Bess said proudly. “All because of you.”

“I didn’t do much of anything,” Scarlett said.

“You did the most important thing.” Bess put one muddy hand on Scarlett’s shoulder. “You refused to give up.”

Scarlett’s eyes twinkled with hope. “First thing tomorrow, I’m going to start experimenting again. This time I won’t stop until I find my talent. No

matter what.”

“Tomorrow?” Bess said. “Not today?”

Scarlett nodded toward the ivy. “Today, I’m making paint for Leo’s mural.”

Bess beamed. She pulled herself out of the reddish mud and held out a hand to Scarlett. “Need me to help you up?”



“I can manage,” Scarlett said. She sighed. “Seems like a shame, though.”

“What do you mean?” asked Bess, confused.

“Getting out of all this lovely mud.” Scarlett squished some of the mud between her fingers. “It feels so wonderfully goopy. Like I’d love to play in it all day. Don’t you feel the same?”

Bess gasped and clapped her hands to her cheeks. The ivy leaves fell in the mud, forgotten for a moment. “Scarlett! I’m not sure, but maybe—just maybe—”

“What?” Scarlett asked.

With a smile, Bess said, “I think I might know what kind of art you should create!”



TOGETHER BESS AND Scarlett raced through Pixie Hollow. Their wings were too muddy for them to fly, but fairies could run quickly when they wanted to. Bess was definitely in a hurry today!

“Where are we going?” Scarlett asked.

“To the pottery workshop!”

The Pixie Hollow pottery workshop was in a hollowed-out stump not far from Mother Dove’s nest. As they swooped downward, Bess and Scarlett saw fairies and sparrow men in aprons, setting out trays of beautiful clay jugs and plates. Other art-talent fairies—mostly painters, like Bess—gathered there, eager to decorate the new creations.

“Hello there!” Bess called as they hurried up. “I was wondering—could Scarlett try making pottery?”

She saw the painting-talent fairies glance at each other. Scarlett had a reputation for disasters. A few people even edged between Scarlett and the new pots, afraid she might knock them over.

A pottery-making fairy named Raku came out of the workshop smiling. “You think Scarlett might be one of us? That would be lovely. Why do you

think so?"

"The mud," Bess explained. She realized that she and Scarlett were still filthy, head to toe.

"When we were out collecting ivy this morning, we fell in the mud, and Scarlett loved it!" Bess said.

Scarlett shrugged. "How could anybody not love mud?"

"That sounds like a potter, all right." Raku gestured to her work apron, which was covered with splatters of clay. It won't matter that Scarlett's messy here, Bess thought. They all are! "Let's give it a try. Ready, Scarlett?"

Scarlett glanced at the crowd of other fairies standing nearby. Bess would have been embarrassed to try—and fail—in front of them. But Scarlett lifted her chin proudly. "Ready!"

Maybe someday, Bess thought, I'll be more like Scarlett, and I won't care what other people think either. I hope so!

They walked inside the workshop. There, fairies and sparrow men kneaded clay on broad wooden tables. Others carefully used big paddles to slide soft new pots into the blazing kiln that would bake them into hardness.

Over her shoulder, Bess glanced at the other fairies and sparrow men who were crowding into the windows to see how Scarlett would do. When Scarlett walked near a shelf of newly fired pots—thin and breakable—a few fairies gasped.

Yet Scarlett broke nothing. She was sure and steady now that she was in the pottery workshop.

She's really different here, Bess thought. It's as if Scarlett belongs. I hope it's true!

Raku brought Scarlett to a small pottery wheel in the corner. "Normally I would give you an apron to protect your dress," Raku said, "but there's not much point, is there?"

Scarlett laughed and pointed at her muddy clothes. "Not today!"

"Here's what you do," Raku explained, as she plopped down a hunk of clay in the center of the wheel. "You press on this pedal on the floor with your foot. That makes the wheel spin."

Scarlett pressed once, and the wheel made a lazy circle.

Raku continued, “Then you dampen your fingers and put your hands on either side of the clay—”

“To center it on the wheel,” Scarlett said. Her eyes were sparkling with delight. “Then you can start to mold the clay.”

“Exactly!” Raku said. “Give it a try.”

A few sparrow men and fairies at the windows started whispering to each other. Bess suspected they were still predicting another disaster.

Come on, Scarlett, she thought. You can do it!



Scarlett began working the pedal, and right away the wheel began spinning merrily. She dipped her hands in a nearby bowl of water, then took hold of the clay. Immediately the shapeless lump became a perfect cone.

“She has it balanced already!” Raku said. “That’s wonderful!”

Right away, Scarlett pressed her fingers into the center of the cone, and as Bess and the others watched, the clay took the shape of a beautiful round bowl.

Everyone at the windows began to clap and cheer.

Scarlett let the wheel spin to a stop. “That was so much fun!” she said. “It felt so—natural! So easy!”

Raku put a hand on her shoulder. “You’re definitely a pottery-talent fairy,” she said. “I don’t even have to tell you what to do next, do I?”

“Next I trim the bottom of the bowl to give it a more pleasing shape,” Scarlett said. “And then I fire it in the kiln, to make it hard, and then I give it to my best friend.” She grinned at Bess.

Bess smiled back. “Then I paint it the prettiest color I can think of.” She looked at the bunches of ivy they had left at the door of the workshop. “Maybe dark green?”

Bess hugged Scarlett tightly. They got mud all over each other, but for once, Bess didn’t mind if everyone saw her get messy. Not one little bit.

